



# **Understanding Men's Health**

## **A Relational and Gender Sensitive Approach**

**Don Sabo**

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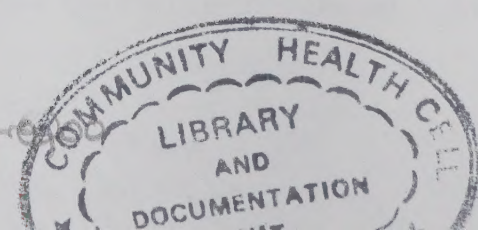
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## **GLOBAL HEALTH EQUITY INITIATIVE**

The working papers in the series on "Gender and Health Equity" arise from two workshops held at the Harvard Center for Population and Development Studies in 1997 and 1998. The workshops were organized as part of the Global Health Equity Initiative (GHEI), a comprehensive project on health equity funded in part by the Rockefeller Foundation and the Swedish International Development Agency. The GHEI is an interdisciplinary project that combines conceptual work on health equity with country-case studies. Other conceptual working groups, similar to the Gender and Health Equity project, are focussing on cross-cutting issues like "measurement", "ethics", and "social determinants". Some of the working papers within this series on Gender and Health Equity will appear jointly in a volume edited by Gita Sen, Pirooska Ostlin and Asha George.





## ABSTRACT

This paper discusses men's health within a critical feminist framework for understanding gender relations. Certain social constructions of masculinity are said to elevate men's risk for morbidity and mortality. Because gender relations are reciprocal in various institutional settings, it is argued that the gendering of men's health behaviors can also influence women's health status. A relational theory of gender and health is developed in order to illustrate a variety of positive and negative gendered health synergies between women and men. The paper concludes by discussing a relational approach to understanding men's health within the larger context of women's health movements and gender health equity.

## Abstract

This paper discusses the health status of the population of the United States. It examines the health status of the population in 1980 and compares it with the health status in 1970. The paper also discusses the health status of the population in 1990 and compares it with the health status in 1980. The paper discusses the health status of the population in 2000 and compares it with the health status in 1990. The paper discusses the health status of the population in 2010 and compares it with the health status in 2000. The paper discusses the health status of the population in 2020 and compares it with the health status in 2010. The paper discusses the health status of the population in 2030 and compares it with the health status in 2020. The paper discusses the health status of the population in 2040 and compares it with the health status in 2030. The paper discusses the health status of the population in 2050 and compares it with the health status in 2040. The paper discusses the health status of the population in 2060 and compares it with the health status in 2050. The paper discusses the health status of the population in 2070 and compares it with the health status in 2060. The paper discusses the health status of the population in 2080 and compares it with the health status in 2070. The paper discusses the health status of the population in 2090 and compares it with the health status in 2080. The paper discusses the health status of the population in 2100 and compares it with the health status in 2090.



## INTRODUCTION

This working paper examines men's health from within a theoretical framework that takes gender into account. Men's health is conceptualized within a critical feminist theory of men, masculinities, and gender relations. A key argument is that certain social constructions of masculinity can be harmful to men's health. A relational analysis is also developed in order to examine synergies between men's and women's health behaviors and outcomes. The central argument is that men's and women's lives are reciprocal within larger patterns of institutional relations, and that gendered aspects of men's lives not only influence men's health outcomes, but also women's health outcomes. Finally, the study of men's health is discussed with the context of gender health equity.

## THE STUDY OF MASCULINITIES, GENDER, & HEALTH

Scholars and researchers have only recently begun to study the influences of gender on men's health and illness (Lorber, 1997; Sabo and Gordon, 1995). Women's health movements emerged during the 1960's and 1970's, and by the mid-1980's, the focus on gender had become an increasingly important aspect of epidemiology, medical sociology, and interdisciplinary studies of psychosocial aspects of illness (Verbrugge, 1985; Waldron, 1983; Stillion, 1985). However, one characteristic of most of this work on gender and health was that research and theory revolved almost exclusively around women. Some early writings in "men's studies" argued that conformity to traditional masculinity often increased men's physical health risks and impoverished their emotional lives (Feigen-Fasteau, 1974; Farrell, 1975; Brannon, 1976). Sex role theory was used to argue that boys learn to adopt masculine behaviors that, in turn, heighten their susceptibility to illness or accidental death.

Critical feminist analyses of men, masculinity and health emerged as "men's health studies" during the 1990's (Sabo & Gordon, 1995). Building on a critique of sex role theory's narrow focus on gender identity, socialization, and conformity to role expectations, critical feminist thinkers emphasize that power differences shape relationships between men and women, women and women, and men and men. They also contend that gender identity and behavior are not simply imposed on individuals by socialization, but that individuals actively construct their gender identity and behavior. Gender identity is actively worked out, revamped, and maintained by individuals who are immersed in socially and historically constructed webs of power relations (Connell, 1995, 1987). Stated another way, cultural definitions of "masculinity" and "femininity" are seen as historically emergent, structurally dynamic constructs through which individuals and groups actively interpret, engage, and construct their daily behaviors and relationships (Messner, 1998; Messner and Sabo, 1995; Baca-Zinn, Hondagneu-Sotello,



Messner, 1998).

### *Constructions of Masculinity and Men's Health*

When individuals actively participate in the construction of their gender identity and behavior, they are said to be "doing gender" (West and Zimmerman, 1987). For many boys and men in the United States, doing traditional masculinity has been associated greater risk for morbidity and mortality (Sabo, 1996; Harrison, Chu & Faracutti, 1988). Courtney's (1998a) review of recent research shows that males in the United States who harbor traditional beliefs about manhood are more likely than their nontraditional counterparts to have poor health habits (Eisler, Skidmore & Ward, 1988), to experience higher rates of depression and psychological stress (Eisler & Blalock, 1991; Good & Mintz, 1990; Sharpe & Heppner, 1991; Oliver & Toner, 1990), and to have greater cardiovascular reactivity in stressful situations (Lash, Eisler & Schulman, 1990). Helgeson (1995) found that, when diagnosed and treated for coronary heart disease, men with negatively masculine traits discussed their heart problems less often with family members, and were more likely to engage in poor health behaviors and have impaired social networks.

Identification with traditional masculinity has been linked to the three leading causes of death among United States males aged 15-34 years; i.e., unintentional injury, homicide, and suicide (*Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*, 1994). Stillion (1995) argues that young men's efforts to appear tough often leads them to ignore safety guidelines on the job, while others drive recklessly as an act of bravado. Men's fascination and respect for violence is often tied up with proving their manhood which, in part, explains their greater risk for homicide than females (Stillion, 1995; Staples, 1995; Reed, 1991). Suicide data show that men attempt suicide less often than women but are more likely to die than women. Stillion (1995) infers that the disparity stems partly from the fact that often males select more violent methods and, compared with females, they see surviving a suicide attempt "as yet another failure, a mark against their masculine adequacy..." (p.52). Canetto's (1995) research found that traditionally masculine expectations elevated the likelihood of a successful suicide for some men.

Courtenay (1998a, b, c) observes that some risk behaviors are culturally defined as "masculine" and, furthermore, that males use unhealthy behavior to define their manhood. For example, males may engage in excessive alcohol consumption in order to display allegiance to the male peer group (Isenhardt & Silversmith, 1994). In many traditional men's sports such as rugby, boxing, or football, the masculine codes glorify pain and injury, encouraging athletes to sacrifice their bodies in order to win at all costs (Sabo, 1994). Traditional gender scripts for men can contribute to unhealthy behaviors. As Courtenay (1998a) writes:



A man who does gender correctly would be relatively unconcerned about his health and well-being in general. He would see himself as stronger, both physically and emotionally, than most women. He would think of himself as independent, not needing to be nurtured by others. He would be unlikely to ask others for help. He would spend much time out in the world and away from home. The intense and active stimulation of his senses would be something he would come to depend on. He would face danger fearlessly, take risk frequently, and have little concern for his own safety (p. 21).

Not all "masculine traits" or forms of masculinity present dangers to men's health. Indeed, men are not all alike, nor do all men have the same stakes in maintaining traditional definitions of masculinity. At any given historical moment, there are competing masculinities--some dominant, some marginalized, and some stigmatized--each with its respective structural, psychosocial, and cultural moorings. Connell (1987) uses the term "hegemonic masculinity" to refer to the prevailing, most lauded, idealized, and valorized form of masculinity in an historical setting. In the United States hegemonic masculinity accentuates male dominance over women, physical strength, aggressiveness, violence proneness, emotional inexpressivity, and competitiveness. In this context, just as men's identification with hegemonic masculinity varies, so too does the extent of health risks associated with traditional masculinity. The challenge for men's health studies is to better understand how certain types of masculine behaviors or traits within a specific culture or institution are correlated with risky behavior and illness.

It is also important to recognize that men not only construct their gender identity with reference to masculinity, but also in relation to women and cultural definitions of femininity. Connell's concept of "emphasized femininity" refers to the cultural ideal that is celebrated for women; i.e., sociability, fragility, passivity, compliance with male desire, and sexual receptivity. Emphasized femininity is constructed in reciprocal and subordinated relation to hegemonic masculinity in ways that reinforce masculine power and male-dominated hierarchies within varying institutional settings. Young males learn that adopting "feminine" forms of behavior can lead to ridicule or stigma and, they sometimes engage in risky behaviors in order to avoid being labeled feminine or effeminate: e.g., an adolescent male gets into fights to keep from being labeled a "sissy", or a middle-aged male hides his chest pains to evade appearing "soft" to his fellow workers.

### *Constructions of Masculinity and Women's Health*

The health risks incurred by men's pursuit of masculinity and/or avoidance of femininity do not simply influence *male* morbidity and mortality. The gendering of men's health behaviors also generates

consequences for *women's* health status. For example, Pleck, Sonenstein and Ku (1992) interviewed a national sample of adolescent, never-married United States males aged 15-19 between 1980 and 1988. Hypothesis tests were geared to assessing whether "masculine ideology" (which measured traits associated with hegemonic masculinity) put boys at risk for an array of problem behaviors. They found that masculine ideology was associated with being suspended from school, drinking and use of street drugs, frequency of being picked up by the police, being sexually active, the number of heterosexual partners in the last year, and tricking or forcing someone to have sex. These kinds of behaviors, which are in part expressions of hegemonic masculinity, elevate boys' risk for sexually transmitted diseases, HIV transmission, and early death by accident or homicide. *At the same time*, however, these behaviors encourage the victimization of women through men's violence, sexual assault, unwanted teenage pregnancy, and sexually transmitted diseases (Sabo, 1998a).

Courtenay (1998b) provides another example of how gendered constructions of men's health behaviors can influence women's health outcomes. He argues that many self-care practices in the United States are culturally framed as "feminine". Whereas mothers often teach girls about their bodies and girls learn self-care through regular physical and reproductive health exams, boys are typically unschooled in these areas. Females make more health care visits than males, even after controlling for reproductive health care visits (Kandrack, Grant & Segall, 1991; Verbrugge, 1988). Research shows that girls are encouraged to be dependent while boys are taught to be independent, and that boys receive less physical and emotional succor than girls do (Lytton and Romney, 1991). Boys are often discouraged from seeking help from their parents (Fagot, 1984). Roter and Hall's (1997) review of research on physician-patient communication showed that female patients are better informed about their ailments than male patients. In short, the construction of masculinity in United States culture does not generally promote self-nurturing attitudes or behaviors among males. It is often women, therefore, who are culturally charged to care for sick boys and men in addition to themselves. This can place an unfair burden on mothers, wives, or girlfriends for maintaining the men's health as well as their own.

It is these latter relational aspects of men's and women's health that have received the least attention from scholars who study gender and health. To date, most of the work on how gender influences health and illness has been *within sexes* rather than *between the sexes*, a split in research and theory that is reflected in the separate labels "women's health" and "men's health" (Sabo & Gordon, 1995). And yet, as Rathgeber & Vlassoff (1993) observe, "A gender approach to disease examines both the differential impact on women and men and also the social, cultural and economic contexts within which they live and work" (pp. 513-14). Critical feminist approaches are consistent with this view, but also point toward a relational analysis that explores the interrelationships between women's and men's health behaviors and outcomes.



## RECIPROCITY AND GENDERED HEALTH SYNERGIES

Women's and men's lives are fundamentally reciprocal and must be understood in relational terms. The concept of reciprocity developed in this section is used to show how women's and men's health are often relational in process and outcome.

The lives of the sexes unfold within social, cultural, and historical contexts. When men and women follow the socially prescribed masculine and feminine scripts, their actions reflect and reproduce institutional arrangements that are based on sex category (West & Zimmerman, 1987). As Connell (1987) puts it, each person occupies a niche in the larger "gender order", which is defined as the "historically constructed pattern of power relations between men and women and definitions of femininity and masculinity" (p. 231). Gender relations emerge and are transformed within varying institutional contexts that take shape within specific institutional settings such as the military, education, or marriage and family. Gender identity and individual displays of masculine or feminine cultural practices, therefore, are better understood as expressions of wider institutional processes that engage both sexes, not just one sex in isolation.

The following examples show how the health of each sex is influenced by sociocultural synergies between the sexes. A *positive gendered health synergy* exists where the pattern of gender relations promotes favorable health processes or outcomes for both sexes. A *negative gendered health synergy* occurs where the pattern of gender relations is associated with unfavorable health processes or outcomes for one or both sexes.

### *Men's Involvement in Pregnancy and Child Care: A Positive Gendered Health Synergy*

As women have become more involved with the work sector, they have pressed men to take on a fair share of housework and child care. However, men's contributions to domestic labor and parenting have not approached parity and many women find themselves returning from jobs outside the home only to do most of housework and child care (Hochschild, 1989). Bird and Fremont (1991) found that women's greater time investment in housework was related to poorer self-reported health. Men's failure to share housework means that female partners often have less time to devote to health-inducing exercise and physical activity (Sabo and Snyder, 1993). In developing nations, women's growing involvement in the informal and formal economic sector is associated with elevated risk for morbidity and, once becoming sick, women often have less opportunity to rest and recover (Vlassoff & Bonilla, 1994).

Some health advocates have called for changes in conjugal roles that would alleviate these negative gendered health synergies. Swedin (1996) suggests that overall family health is more likely to issue when spouses adopt a partnership model for negotiating the combined demands of child care and

occupational involvement. His research showed that, when men participate in "father training" groups, they were more likely to develop closer bonds with wives and healthier relationships with their children. Few couples achieve the ideal of "shared parenthood", however, and one reason is that men often do not have a clear view of what role to play in relation to pregnancy, childbirth, and child care. Nonetheless, policies calling for "shared parenthood", "father training", or "paid parental leave" appear to make sense with regard to *both* women's and men's health.

### *Prison as a Pocket of Risk: A Negative Gendered Health Synergy*

Rates of imprisonment vary around the world. Nearly 1.6 million persons are imprisoned in the United States (600/100,000), compared with 1.2 million in China (103/100,000), and 1 million in Russia (690/100,000). Prison populations tend to be disproportionately male, economically impoverished, and in some nations, mostly racial and ethnic minorities. In the United States, Blacks comprise 50% of the male prison population, and Hispanics another 15% (Miller, 1996; Mauer, 1995). Prisons are also gendered institutions (Carrabine & Longhurst, 1998), exhibiting earmarks of patriarchal institutions such as sex segregation, hierarchical relationships, and social control through aggression and violence (Sabo, Kupers & London, forthcoming). The gendering of prison life is also evident in the constructions of masculinity among prisoners that revolve around a male code for acting tough, being prepared to fight, avoiding intimacy, minding one's own business, and avoiding feminine behaviors (Kupers, 1999; Newton, 1994). The cultural trappings of hegemonic masculinity are also present in the current call by politicians for harsher punishments of prisoners and the move away from rehabilitative approaches.

Epidemiologically, the North American corrections system acts as a whirlpool of risk for many men who, even before they are arrested and jailed, reside in structurally disadvantaged communities where poverty, unemployment, and racial oppression already yield higher morbidity and mortality rates (e.g., tuberculosis, hepatitis, and AIDS) (Polych & Sabo, forthcoming). Because of unhealthy prison conditions, they are yet again exposed to heightened risk for illness (Toepell, 1992; Bellin, Fletcher & Safyer, 1993; Kupers, 1999). For example, the incidence of active tuberculosis among New York State prisoners went from 15/100,000 in the 1970's to 139/100,000 in 1993, while 58% of new TB infections among medical personnel working with these inmates were attributed to occupational exposure (Steenland, Levine, Sieber, Schulte & Aziz, 1997). A study of New York City jails, where the average inmate stay is 65 days, found that one year of jail time doubled the probability of contracting TB. The authors expressed concerns that, should a multi-drug resistant strain of TB enter the jail system, the resulting infection would be rapidly transmitted to the wider urban population as inmates returned to their homes (Bellin, Fletcher & Safyer, 1993). In addition, despite the realities of man-on-man sexual relations (both consensual sex and rape) and iv-drug use in prisons, inmates are rarely provided with condoms or



clean needle works, thus elevating risk for contagious disease (Cummings, 1991; Expert Committee, 1994).

The failure of corrections institutions to provide health education and effective treatment interventions is putting prisoners at greater risk for disease as well as the public at large (Courtenay and Sabo, forthcoming; Polych & Sabo, 1995). Prisons are not sealed off from their surrounding communities, and men constantly move in and out of the corrections system, oftentimes carrying physical or mental illness with them. The average prison sentence in the United States is less than five years, and about 95% of all prisoners are eventually released, despite the trends toward longer sentences (Kupers, 1999). Upon release, many infected male prisoners return to communities in which poor and racially oppressed populations of *both* males and females already exhibit disproportionately higher rates of HIV infection and AIDS (Zierler & Krieger, 1997). The cycles of risk and infection grind forward.

Despite the World Health Organization's call for greater therapeutic and rehabilitative corrections practices, American prison policies continue to emphasize punishment and endanger the public health. Negative gendered health synergies are set into motion through which punitive, predominantly male prison administrators maintain policies and conditions that jeopardize the health of male prisoners and corrections staff, and concomitantly, the women and children in their lives.

### *Extramarital Sex and Contagion: Negative Gendered Health Synergies*

A variety of studies of sexually transmitted infection reveal a pattern of gender relations and reciprocal constructions of masculinity and femininity that constitute negative gendered health synergies. Zambrana (1997) conducted focus groups on conjugal sexual practices with lower-middle-class professional men who worked in Bolivian non-government organizations. The men said they were bored with conjugal sex, and that their wives "just lay there". Yet they also admitted that they would be disconcerted by expressions of sexual innovation or autonomy by their wives, perhaps suspecting them of extramarital sexual involvement. Within Bolivian culture, while men learn to be sexual initiators and active coital participants, women generally internalize feminine cultural expectations that call for sexual passivity and virgin like chastity.

The cultural scripting of conjugal sexual relations in accordance with masculine agency and feminine passivity among these Bolivian couples was associated with elevated risk for sexually transmitted disease for *both* sexes. Many men reported seeking sexual excitement outside marriage with girlfriends or prostitutes in order to satisfy their urges. That extramarital sexual activity was a shared cultural expectation among the men was evidenced by the fact that some of those who did not engage in extramarital sex reported telling their friends that they had done so, in order to affect masculine adequacy. Concomitantly, wifely conformity to passive femininity may have lowered women's willingness to

confront or question their husbands about extramarital sex or their sexual practices with other women. The lack of communication around sexual practices might have been further blocked by the men's need for control in their marriage. In the end, the reciprocal constructions of conjugal sexualities around masculine agency and feminine passivity merged to elevate risk for sexually transmitted infections for both spouses and in the larger community, as well as maintaining male hegemony with reference to both marriage and sexuality.

A study of the cultural practices used by Zimbabwe women and men to prepare for sex reveals clear linkages between gender identity construction, sexual behavior, and transmission of HIV (Ray, Gumbo, & Mbizvo, 1996). The researchers describe how men's perceptions of coitus and masculine potency, and reciprocally, women's use of vaginal drying agents and passive compliance to gearing the sex act to evoke male pleasure, are putting women directly at risk for reproductive tract infection and HIV. Meanwhile, caught up in the migrant labor system spawned by development, the men work in towns, factories, or mines and periodically visit their ancestral homes in villages which are maintained by wives. The husbands' sexual relationships with girl friends and prostitutes while away from home puts them at risk for contracting STD's and HIV, which they carry back to the conjugal bed. In short, the authors point to a confluence of etiological factors and patterned gender relations that promote sexually transmitted infection among some Harare couples.

Gender inequality and gender expectations are also implicated in HIV transmission among women in the United States (Zierler & Krieger, 1997). The number of AIDS cases among American women who were infected through having sex with men grew during the 1990's (Centers for Disease Control, 1998). Several studies show that women who are dependent on male partners for social status or economic support are less apt to expect or negotiate condom use (Pivnick, 1993; Wyatt & Dunn, 1991). Psychological dependence on male partners (e.g., feelings of isolation, powerlessness) have also been associated with women's reluctance to discuss risk reduction practices (Amara, 1995). Reciprocally, men's economic advantage over women partners and presumed masculine superiority may give them a sense of sexual entitlement that precludes adoption of safer sex practices.

Despite cross-cultural differences, the above studies show how reciprocal constructions of gender identity and behavior inform sexual conduct between males and females in ways that elevate health risks for both sexes.

### *Gender Equity in Athletics and Women's Health: Mixed Gendered Health Synergies*

The numbers of girls participating in sports and fitness activities in many post-industrial nations has mushroomed in recent decades. In the United States girls now comprise about 37% of high school athletes, representing an increase from 1 in 27 girls who participated in 1971 to 1 in 3 girls in 1994. The



ratio for boys during this time frame remained constant at 1 in 2. In 1994-95, 2,240,000 girls participated in high school sports, compared to 3,554,429 boys, 37% and 63% respectively (National Federation of State High School Association, 1995-1996).

The President's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports (1997) published an interdisciplinary report on the connections between physical activity and well-being in girls' lives. Increased physical activity was positively associated with girls' musculo-skeletal and cardiovascular functioning, psychological well-being, relationships with friends and family, and performance in school. Athletic participation has also been correlated with reduced risk for teen pregnancy among females (Sabo, et al, 1998; Miller et al, 1998; Zill, Nord & Loomis, 1995). When sport programs are organized effectively, they can be a developmental aid and public health asset for girls and, by inference, for boys as well" (Sabo, 1997, p. xxvii).

Despite the increases in female participation and legislative mandates for equality of opportunity in athletics in the United States, the struggle for gender equity in athletics continues. Political resistance on the part of male elites in sports organizations and gender stereotypes about male athleticism and female frailty continue to thwart efforts to secure gender equity in sport (Cahn, 1994; Hargreaves, 1994), and the resulting barriers to girls' and women's physical activity can be considered a negative gendered health synergy.

At the same time, however, positive gendered health synergies between women and men are also operating in United States sport. For example, legislation supporting gender equity in American athletics was drafted by *both* women and men members of congress. Increasing numbers of male school administrators, coaches, and athletic directors are pursuing greater athletic opportunities for girls. Males are bringing law suits on behalf of their daughters, teams, or clients. Finally, public health advocates in Kenya, Mali, and Vietnam are using community or school athletic programs as a social nexus to convey messages to youth of both sexes about HIV transmission and other reproductive health matters (Brady, 1998). Government-backed sport programs and policies in Australia, Great Britain, Northern Ireland, New Zealand, Scotland and Wales are developing quality sporting opportunities for girls and boys as a preventative health strategy (Ogle, 1997).

## CONCLUSION

Garcia-Moreno (1998) writes that the "purpose of gender analysis is...to identify, analyze and act upon inequalities that arise from belonging to one sex or the other, or from the unequal power relations between the sexes". Consonant with this goal, this chapter has used critical feminist theory in order to discuss men's health issues within the context of the larger gender order.

Advocates for gender perspectives in health have generally sought to improve health equity by

ensuring that the sexes receive similar levels and quality of health care services, by fostering research on women's health and program evaluation, and by securing comparable resource allocation to meet women's health needs (Whitehead, 1992). In this way, proponents of gender health equity call for more "gender aware" policies, but their messages are not always heard by the males who predominate in the leadership and planning circles of national and international health governance organizations (Pfrannenschmidt & McKay, 1997).

Some men are skeptical of efforts to increase resources for women's health. When viewed as an outcome measure, they point to data showing greater longevity for women that seem to confound or undermine women's call for prioritizing women's health initiatives. The surface question becomes whether the appeals for more resources for women's health should be heeded in light of men's greater mortality? This type of thinking, however, reveals a tendency to see issues of gender equity in categorical and binary terms; i.e., men versus women. Moreover, it places more importance on biological health outcomes independent of the social processes that influence health and well-being.

When these concerns about men's greater mortality rates enter the dialogue around gender health equity, women's health advocates sometimes infer that a focus on men's health could undermine the rationale for gender health equity; e.g., a heightened concern for men's health might detract from women's efforts to secure greater awareness and resource allocation for women's health needs. However, the basic question should be: how can the study of men's health be integrated into a theory of women's health or gender and health? Or as Sabo and Gordon (1995) ask, "How can men's health studies position itself in relation to women's health studies, women's studies, gender studies, or the feminist paradigm?" (p. 16). Politically, the issues generally revolve around finding a place for men within feminist theory and practice, and more specifically, mapping out men's roles in relation to women's health movements.

This chapter presented a gender-sensitive analysis of men's health by examining how constructions of masculinity sometimes influence men's health outcomes. Furthermore, the gendering of men's health behaviors and outcomes was also shown to influence women's health status. A relational framework was developed in order to explore both positive and negative gendered health synergies between the sexes. Finally, men's health advocates can adopt a woman-centered orientation by learning more about how programs and policies impact the gendered health synergies between the sexes as well as within each sex.

A great deal of emphasis has been placed on gender differences in epidemiological and sociological writings on health, whether in developed or developing countries (MacIntyre, Hunt & Sweeting, 1996). Research has been typically geared to identifying differences in the health of women and men and then theorizing their etiology. The emphasis on gender differences has been highly useful but, perhaps, it has also deflected research on some of the similarities between women's and men's health



risks or, in the context of this chapter, the relational character of gendered health synergies that can positively or negatively influence the health outcomes of both sexes.

A relational framework fosters understanding of the interdependencies between women's and men's lives and respective health statuses. Finally, relational approaches can also bring men's health issues into the dialogue around gender health equity in ways that do not erode sensitivity and commitment to women's health issues and policy agendas.



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